



No Soup For You! No Park For You!

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, February 15, 2010

Last week the Council tackled two agenda items related to parks. One was to apply for a state grant. There is \$184 million up for grabs for the entire state of California to be spent on city parks. California has 36 million people and San Jose has one million. If San Jose were to get 1/36th of those state funds, that would be \$5 million.

Unfortunately, San Jose will not get any special consideration for our large population since the grant is focusing on low-income communities. Even our best park projects may not fare well due to our higher income levels citywide compared to other areas of the state. The wish list San Jose park staff submitted is for \$55 million of park and trail projects.

I know the chance of state money for parks may sound exciting, but really it is sad commentary since the current council policy exempts affordable housing from paying park fees which has resulted in \$70-90 million dollar loss to the city for parks. \$70-90 million that could have purchased open space and trails so that all residents have access to a healthy community. I do not support this inequitable policy that makes us beg for a small piece of the pie when our own council policy made us lose the entire pie.

The other item was the city postponing the opening of 11 parks city-wide because there is no money to fund operations and maintenance. Residents came and spoke and asked: "Why doesn't the city outsource park maintenance, which would cost less money?" Or "Why not let volunteers do all the maintenance." Well, the council voted on outsourcing a few months back when a new stricter competition policy was passed by 7-4 vote that killed any chance for outsourcing (I joined the Mayor in voting no). San Jose residents do not care who maintains a park just that it is maintained.

We have had great success with the Friends of the San Jose Rose Garden due to Terry Reilly's commitment to organizing volunteers to help maintain all the roses at the park. The volunteers help augment the park maintenance and do not replace park maintenance personnel.

It is a partnership between volunteers and city park staff. The current council policy does not allow for volunteers to operate lawn mowers, for example, which is a big part of park maintenance at parks city wide.

Another option I have voiced is allowing housing developers who deliver a turnkey park to maintain the new park for three years at their cost. In return, however, they should be allowed to pay the market rate and be able to hire and fire the private park maintenance service as they wish. This would save the city money, provide open space to residents and ensure new parks are defect free. Unfortunately this proposal is dead on arrival since the majority of the council would not support it.

So what we are seeing with the city ripping out plant landscaping in traffic medians and not opening parks since we do not have funds to maintain either of them, is just a small appetizer when it comes to plugging a \$100 million dollar budget deficit. Remember the residents are second in this city after others get their cut. Hold on to your hats and definitely your wallets as it is going to get much worse.

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